



Building Hope with Open Hearts

PASTORAL LETTER – ARCHBISHOP DERMOT FARRELL

JESUS' CONCERN IS FOR OUR HEARTS... he seeks to draw us close, heart-to-heart with him. 'Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest.' (Mt 11:28). Jesus calls us to closeness with God, into intimacy with the One who gives us life, and invites us into the relationship that brings us into fullness of life (see Jn 10:10). It is in the depth of our hearts (see Mk 7:6) that we meet God as we respond to the mysteries of life, and are brought into silence and wonder.

This relationship is the deeper – one might say, sacred – foundation of our life in the Church. With Christ – through him, and with him, and in him – we live out the gospel, we live out of the words and actions of Jesus that have been handed on to us.

This relationship with Jesus is also the foundation of *Building Hope*, as we've been calling our journey of renewal in the Archdiocese of Dublin: as people of faith, 'encounter with the person of Jesus makes us who we are, and shapes what we do'. (*Statement of Mission*, February 2022).


It is in this context that I speak to you today about the *Building Hope Pastoral Strategic Planning Resource 2025–2027*. After three years of prayer, reflection and tentative action, this Planning Resource brings us to a significant new phase of *Building Hope*. It asks of us an 'open heart', open to Christ and to his Spirit, as together, we seek to build our partnerships of parishes – *Building Hope with Open Hearts*. These materials are the result of broad consultation and dialogue, prayer, reflection, action, and further reflection, undertaken in parishes and partnerships of parishes. I ask you all to join with me in using the resources developed here, as you explore creative and courageous ways to renew the Church in our diocese.

In order to support this initiative in the coming weeks, Workshops associated with the *Building Hope* Planning Resource, which I ask parish leaders to attend, will seek to guide us, using a synodal method of PRAYER – REFLECTION – PLANNING, taking action together in parishes and partnerships of parishes over the coming three years, 2025–2027. In engaging with this resource, we are called to encourage each other. This will mean moving beyond certain worries that we understandably have, as well as facing up to the 'resistance' that often surfaces when we need to change. This is the vision of *Building Hope with Open Hearts*.

In his letter for the World Day of Prayer for Creation, published today, Pope Francis puts it this way: 'As people who dare to dream, we must dream with our eyes wide open, impelled by a desire for love, fraternity, friendship and justice for all' (Pope Francis, *Hope and Act with Creation*, 2). As he always does, the Holy Father underlines how the Holy Spirit guides us 'in embracing the humility of those who care for others and for all of creation.' (*Hope and Act with Creation*, 5).

Strange as it may be to our ears: nothing fruitful happens in the Church without the Holy Spirit (see Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* – Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 4, and Saint John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 18). Nothing changes for the good without the Holy Spirit, 'the Lord, the giver of





life,' as we constantly pray in the Creed. We have much to learn in this respect. When we look at the story of the early Church, in the Acts of the Apostles, or in the letters of Saint Paul, we see 'that the true protagonist in the history of the church is the Holy Spirit... Opening up to listen to the Spirit is not about detecting rare and subtle signals; it means looking at how, in concrete terms, the gospel challenges [our] life,' our way of being with each other in our parishes and in the world (see Cardinal José Tolentino Mendonça, *The Mysticism of the Present Moment* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist, 2021), p. 111).

Our faith calls us to open our hearts, not only to renewing our own commitment to Christ, but to rediscovering our parishes and partnerships of parishes as places of mission. It is the whole Church that is missionary, not just priests and religious (see Second Vatican Council, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* – Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, especially 1–2). Long before the Second Vatican Council, this was one the great insights of Frank Duff, a man of profound faith, and a Dubliner through and through. As we pray in our *Building Hope* Prayer: 'May our hearts and minds be filled with your Word, bringing forth truth, justice and peace.'

In all our parishes, in every parish of this Diocese, there are vibrant communities who live out the gospel, who live out of the words and actions Jesus has handed on to us. Those vibrant communities may now be small, but smallness is not the issue. Smallness was never an issue for Jesus, and smallness is never an issue for his heavenly Father, with whom he is one (see Jn 10:30): 'Do not be afraid, little flock...' (Lk 12:32). Remember "the Mustard Seed... the smallest of all seeds..." (Mt 13:31–32)! Smallness is not an issue for the Father of Jesus, because the Creator sees the potential in what He has created: God sees what things can be. God looks at what creation can give, what all can become.

The Church in Europe finds itself in a time, both of decline and of new beginning. The decline is there for all to see. However, Christ calls people of faith to look at the Church from the standpoint of his Father. Let us look at the Church – and the world – with the eyes of God. Smallness is not an end-point, but a beginning. This is how the Church began. It is always how the Church begins. Let us find our way, step-by-step, working more deeply together, as we build our partnerships of parishes, embracing the road the Spirit is bringing us on, in such a way that, as Pope Francis says, 'our lives can become a song of love for God, for humanity, with and for creation' (*Hope and Act with Creation*, 9).

May God who has begun this good work in us bring it to completion.



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